

**Abstract 575**

**TITLE:** Involving Substance Abuse Treatment Consumers in HIV Education Planning: Using Consumer Focus Groups

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**ISSUE:** On-site substance abuse treatment HIV education planners have overlooked a rich resource in consumer involvement. Using the focus group format as a means to elicit consumer input, this presentation demonstrates the potential for innovative, useful HIV education program ideas for substance abusers seeking treatment.

**SETTING:** On site at representative substance abuse treatment programs in Massachusetts

**PROJECT:** SPHERE, the Statewide Program for HIV Education in Recovery Environments in Massachusetts administered a simple set of questions at several substance abuse treatment sites to small groups of treatment consumers during the months of January and February 1999. Questions included information about previous treatment experiences, quality of HIV prevention during previous treatment, level of HIV risk reduction chosen and recommendations for future on-site education. Participants were recruited by site staff and were compensated with a meal and a cash stipend. The resulting conversations were audio taped, and SPHERE staff developed a summary report.

**RESULTS:** The conversations produced rich qualitative data directly from treatment consumers, reflecting their own experience with substance abuse treatment, HIV education and attempts at HIV risk reduction. Recommendations included innovative suggestions for identifying and meeting HIV-related needs of consumers. The resulting information adds considerably to the body of needs assessment information for program planning in Massachusetts, and the format is easily reproducible and inexpensive to administer.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Conscious inclusion of program consumers in the planning of HIV education programs results in enhanced quality of planning information, program design and program effectiveness.

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